MOTORISTS stranded on Murree Road on Sunday after heavy snowfall in Nathiagali, Abbottabad. — Online

CM vows to oppose decisions made behind 'closed doors'

Claims conspiracies being hatched to impose governor's rule in KP, disqualify and even assassinate him

By Fazal Khaliq/Haleem Asad

CHIEF Minister Sohail Afridi waves to supporters at a rally in Barikot, Swat, on Sunday. — Dawn

SWAT/LOWER DIR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi has said that he stands openly against decisions made behind 'closed doors', claiming conspiracies were being hatched to impose governor's rule in the province and even assassinate him. He vowed to foil any 'unconstitutional' move in his province. He made the remarks while addressing a large rally under the PTI's 'Street Movement' at Amankot Chowk in Mingora on Sunday.

Earlier, the chief minister arrived at Amankot Chowk, where party workers and leaders gave him a warm reception. His convoy was also welcomed at Qambar Chowk, Balogram Chowk, and in Barikot. He later addressed gatherings at various locations.

Provincial Minister for higher education Meena Khan Afridi, information minister Shafi Jan, MNAs Shahid Khan Khattak, Dr Amjad Ali, Saleem Rehman and Suhail Sultan, along with MPAs Fazal Hakeem Khan, Hameedur Rehman, Ali Shah Khan Advocate, Akhtar Khan Advocate, Mohammad Naeem, and other party leaders accompanied the chief minister.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Afridi said: "When PTI founder Imran Khan nominated me for the office of chief minister, there was strong opposition, but the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gave him (Imran) a clear mandate through their votes, and now this province will continue to be governed under his leadership."

He alleged that "organised narratives were deliberately created against him; efforts were made to portray him as a terrorist, and even a press conference was held by the head of an institution in which videos were shown against him."

The chief minister further claimed: "Plans were made to impose governor's rule in KP, to disqualify me, and even to assassinate me, while an operation was launched in my ancestral constituency that displaced local residents."

He clarified, "We are not against the army or other state institutions, but we will openly oppose decisions taken behind closed doors against the will of the people."

The chief minister said that "a deliberate attempt is being made to create confrontation between the provincial government and institutions in order to defame the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government." Referring to an incident, he added, "When I received the news of a soldier's martyrdom, I immediately left a meeting and attended the funeral, which clearly shows our respect for state institutions."

Announcing a change in approach, the chief minister said, "From today onwards, every matter with the federal government will be conducted in writing and with evidence." He added, "A jirga of the Afridi tribe will be convened to ask the people whether they were forcibly displaced or left their areas voluntarily. If the people confirm displacement, I myself will accompany them back to Tirah."

Mr Afridi said, "Swat is the land of the brave, and its people will not remain silent spectators." Referring to Murad Saeed, he stated, "The PTI leader was declared undesirable for raising the people's case, but we stand with him because he has remained firm in defending public rights."

The chief minister further said, "Imran Khan has issued clear instructions for a street movement from jail, and the enthusiasm of the people in Mingora proves that the public is fully prepared." He added, "Imran Khan has entrusted the authority for negotiations and protests to the Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Mahmood Khan Achakzai and Senate Opposition Leader Allama Nasir Raja, and this time the protest will be carried out with full preparation and a clear strategy."

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Sohail Afridi said the province was "not a laboratory" for political experiments, vowing to stand firm with the Pakhtuns and the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Addressing a big protest rally in Chakdara, the chief minister said the ruling authorities were afraid of the public, adding that honour, disgrace, life and death rested with Allah and he would not be intimidated, our correspondent from Lower Dir adds.

"I am Imran Khan's soldier and all my ministers are his soldiers. The PTI founder is in jail for the sake of our children while his sisters are making sacrifices. The courts are unable to deliver justice to him," he said, adding that workers were ready to make any sacrifice for his release.

Mr Afridi vowed that his party would continue struggle within the bounds of the Constitution and law. "We will face every challenge. This is Imran Khan's instruction – prepare for a street movement."

PTI provincial president and MNA Junaid Akbar also addressed the gathering and took a pledge from workers that they would rise in unison if governor's rule was imposed.

The crowd chanted slogans in support of the PTI founder throughout the rally.

Earlier, PTI workers gave a warm welcome to the chief minister upon his arrival in Chakdara. Although he was scheduled to reach the venue at 2pm, he arrived around 5.35pm.

From early morning, party workers led by PTI lawmakers from Lower and Upper Dir, and Bajaur began gathering at Chakdara Chowk. The venue was packed by the time the chief minister arrived.

Before his address, MPAs Malik Shafiullah, Ubaidur Rehman, Hamayun Khan, Malik Liaquat Ali, Azam Khan, Anwarzeb, Razaullah, former MNA Gul Dad, and MNA Sibghatullah, among others, spoke to keep workers engaged.

Speakers said a "sea of people" would take to the streets on February 8 for Imran Khan's release, adding that the PTI founder would soon return to the public as he could not be kept in jail any longer. They said party workers had made sacrifices in the past and would not hesitate to do so again. Workers remained charged throughout the gathering, chanting slogans in favour of the PTI founder.

Body of social media influencer recovered from snow in Oghi

By Our Correspondent

MANSEHRA: Body of a social media influencer, who went missing after being trapped in heavy snowfall in a high-altitude area of Oghi tehsil a few days ago, was recovered on Saturday, while three other boys stranded in the Siri Paye area of the Shogran tourist resort were rescued.

"Both operations were carried out by our personnel with the support of police and residents in extremely difficult mountainous terrain. We recovered the body of the social media influencer who had gone to Machaisar Top to film the snowfall on Thursday," Rescue 1122 district emergency officer Ibrar Ali told reporters.

The deceased was identified as Anayat Gulzar, 25, a resident of the Maloga area of Oghi.

"The deceased undertook the gruelling eight-hour trek on foot alone, but told his family he was accompanied by someone," Mr Ali said.

The official said the youth became exhausted and, during his last phone call, informed his friends that it was difficult for him to move further amid heavy snowfall. Contact with him was lost shortly afterwards.

"A 12-member search team, including eight family members and friends of the deceased and four Rescue 1122 personnel, reached the hilltop. Following extensive search efforts, the body was recovered," he added.

Meanwhile, a joint team of Rescue 1122, tourism police, and the district police's Quick Response Unit rescued three boys, who had remained stranded for more than 34 hours amid heavy snowfall in the high-altitude Siri Paye area of Shogran.

The boys, who served tourist hours trips on payment, had been trapped since Thursday.

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS: Peshawar High Court's green bench has stopped all sorts of constructions in Kaghan Valley ordering Kaghan Development Authority to submit a comprehensive report of all structures, including commercial buildings, constructed in breach of laws.

"We have moved PHC seeking demolition of the structures built on the land of national parks in Hazara division in breach of Wildlife Act, 2015," lawyer Kiran Ayub Tanoli told reporters here on Sunday.

She said her client, Mian Mohammad Shafi, moved a writ petition in Abbottabad circuit bench pointing illegal constructions at Saiful Muluk National Park, Dodipatsar-Lolusar National Park in Kaghan Valley of Mansehra and Ayubia National Park in Abbottabad.

ANAYAT Gulzar

Peace body member killed, cousin injured in Bannu attack

By Our Correspondent

BANNU: A peace committee member was killed and his cousin suffered injuries in an attack near an Afghan refugee camp in Domel tehsil of Bannu district here on Sunday, the police said.

The deceased, Khwajatullah, and his injured cousin, Naseemullah belonged to the Gangikhel area.

According to the police, the incident occurred when the two were present at a shop in the Tehsil Colony to purchase some groceries. Two unidentified armed men arrived at the shop and opened indiscriminate fire on them.

As a result of the firing, Khwajatullah died on the spot, while Naseemullah was injured. The injured was immediately shifted to a nearby hospital, where he is currently under treatment.

In his statement to Domel police, the injured said that the attack was sudden and that they had no personal enmity or dispute with anyone.

District police officer Yasir Afridi said that investigations were underway and all possible angles were being examined to ascertain the motive behind the incident.

Meanwhile, the police's bomb disposal squad neutralised an explosive device planted by unknown terrorists on Eidgah Road in Domel.

A police official said the bomb weighed between three and four kilogrammes and was fitted with a remote-control device. He said due to the professional expertise and prompt response of the bomb disposal squad, the area was saved from a major tragedy.

It is worth mentioning here that on January 21, a tragic incident occurred near Doctor Khan College in Domel tehsil, where underage boys found a toy-like bomb. As soon as the children picked it up, a powerful explosion occurred, leaving both boys seriously injured.

The DPO appreciated the timely and professional action of the police and the bomb disposal squad, stating that their swift response prevented possible loss of life and property.

Chief secy reviews conservation work on historical guardhouse

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Secretary Syed Shahab Ali Shah on Sunday visited the historical guardhouse of the revenue department here to review the restoration and conservation work being carried out on it.

He was accompanied by Peshawar division commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud, Peshawar deputy commissioner Sanaullah, director archaeology Abdul Samad, senior journalist, poet, writer and columnist Abasin Yousafzai, and individuals associated with arts and culture.

The visit aimed to assess the efforts made to restore the historical significance of the building following its beautification and renovation.

On the occasion, Mr Mehsud briefed the chief secretary on the progress of uplift projects completed under the Peshawar Uplift Programme Phase-II. He stated that several projects had been successfully completed, which would not only enhance the city's beauty but also provide better facilities to the public and help revive Peshawar's historical identity.

Mr Mehsud said the completed projects included renovation of the historical Agriculture Institute, various development schemes at the University of Peshawar, construction of jogging and cycling tracks in Hayatabad, restoration of Govt Higher Secondary School No 1, Peshawar City, development and beautification of Zoro Road, construction of feature walls on University Road, development of Iqra Chowk and Markhor Chowk, plantation along University Road, Ring Road and D-Tour Road and restoration of the historical revenue department guardhouse. He added that renovation and restoration work of the historical Islamia College would commence soon.

The Peshawar commissioner said consultations were going on with various schools of thought and representatives of arts and culture to utilise the guardhouse as a cultural and art centre, or for another suitable public purpose. — APP

Centre, KP trade blame over Tirah displacement

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spreading "disinformation against security institutions and (to) further vested political interests".

It claimed that the federal government and the armed forces did not ask anyone to leave their homes for the operation, adding that intelligence-based operations being conducted by the forces did not require "de-population or migration".

The ministry stated that according to the Khyber deputy commissioner "the voluntary movement reflects the views and preferences of the local population, articulated through a representative jirga convened at the district level, taking into account seasonal, logistical and contextual considerations, as well as a non-camp-based modality".

The information ministry also mentioned a Dec 26 notification by the KP Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement department for the release of funds, reportedly Rs4 billion, for the anticipated temporary and voluntary movement of the population from certain localities of Tirah (Bagh). These funds were seemingly required for relief-related arrangements for those leaving Tirah.

"Hence any stated position… that the said migration has anything to do with the armed forces is false, and fabricated, given with mala fide intent to gain political capital and unfortunately, malign security institutions and therefore highly regrettable," the statement concluded.

KP contests claim

KP Chief Minister's information aide Shafi Jan, however, contested the federal claim, saying it was an attempt by the Centre to shift the entire blame for the displacement of people from Tirah Valley and the "ongoing operation" onto the provincial government.

He claimed the people were forced to migrate due to the proposed operation. "The speeches of federal ministers Khawaja Asif and Talal Chaudhry in the National Assembly regarding the operation are on record," the statement quoted the special assistant as saying.

Mr Jan said that the federal government should have taken the province, all political parties, and other stakeholders into confidence, but, claimed that it was unfortunately imposing its decisions on Peshawar, while the affected people had been left to their own devices in difficult times.

The CM's aide said the provincial government released funds to provide timely relief to the affected people, while the federal government's "insensitivity on this issue was highly deplorable".

Interestingly, the KP CM had ordered five registration camps for those displaced, as per a video posted on the Deputy Commissioner's Facebook page on Jan 21.

In the video, the official said that five camps, four at Bara and one at Painda Cheena, were being set up for the registration of the respective clans of the Afridi tribe on the CM's orders.

It may be noted that the KP CM, who also hails from Khyber, has been vehemently opposing the military operation in the district, at least in his public remarks.

Earlier this month, in an X post, Mr Afridi said that decisions regarding the military operation in Tirah were being taken behind closed doors.

A government official also told *Dawn* that the matter was neither discussed by the provincial cabinet nor was the provincial government in the loop about the evacuation date.

The official said the agreement signed by the jirga members and the administration also included the input of the security forces, who were a stakeholder in this process. The signed copy of the agreement, however, had not been made public.

Halt in evacuation drive

As harsh weather took a toll on the displaced populace, the Khyber district administration on Thursday posted two messages, asking the residents to stop evacuating their homes due to inclement weather.

"The residents of Tirah are advised not to travel on Thursday, January 22, and Friday, January 23, due to inclement weather. The displacement would commence as soon as weather conditions improve," the update read.

Besides, Khyber Additional DC (relief) Irshad Ali also uploaded a video message on the same page, asking the locals to stop evacuations till the weather improved. Two children had lost their lives due to a road accident on Wednesday, while there were reports of more accidents in Bar Qambarkhel, he added.

These directives came after a rescue operation was conducted to evacuate at least 1,500 people stranded in a snowstorm. The operation lasted two days, according to a Rescue 1122 statement on Thursday.

According to sources, several terrorist outfits, including Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), had set up camp in Tirah, making the valley vulnerable to militancy. They claimed that IS-K had a hideout in the area and, according to intelligence reports, an Azerbaijani suicide attacker tasked with attacking Maulana Fazlur Rehman at a gathering in Peshawar last year had been living in the valley.

Besides, it was claimed that the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group had developed a nexus with the Lashkar-i-Islam militant outfit in Khyber, and was eager to set up bases in the area. Similarly, Jamaatul Ahraar and other smaller groups were also active in the area.